

The Malibu Times

NEWS

Council wants to snuff out tobacco sales to minors

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The city wants an ordinance that would punish stores that sell tobacco to underage youth. Also, the city has won a \$300,000 grant to improve safety on Pacific Coast Highway.

By Knowles Adkisson / The Malibu Times

To fight what critics call the glaring problem of tobacco sales to underage youth in Malibu, the City Council Monday night directed city staff to prepare a tobacco licensing ordinance that would require local businesses that sell tobacco to register with the city.

It was also announced Monday night that the city had received a \$300,000 grant from Caltrans to improve safety on Pacific Coast Highway.

The tobacco ordinance, proposed by Mayor Pro Tem Laura Rosenthal, would require the 16 stores that currently sell tobacco products in Malibu to register with the city. Once registered, the stores would be subject to two to three undercover sting operations per year by the Malibu/Lost Hills Sheriff's Station to assure compliance. If a store were caught selling tobacco products to minors, it would lose its tobacco registration for a minimum of three months before it could reapply. Repeat offenses would result in longer waiting periods.

City Manager Jim Thorsen said there was room in the city's approximately \$6 million annual contract with the Sheriff's Department to pay for the undercover operations.

The proposed ordinance comes on the heels of a recent survey that found six of the 16 stores in Malibu that carry tobacco products were selling to minors. That equals 37 percent of the tobacco retailers in Malibu, nearly five times the average in California of 7.7 percent.

"I just think it's really important [to do] anything we can in this city to make it harder for people under 18 to get tobacco products," Rosenthal said.

Several speakers during public comment Monday night said it was far too easy for minors to buy tobacco in Malibu.

Malibu resident Amber Tachdijian said she had been the guardian for a student at Malibu High School, where it was known that Malibu was "a pretty easy place to buy cigarettes." Tachdijian said several of the student's friends in Santa Monica purchased cigarettes in Malibu, since it was known to be easier to do so here.

After other speakers noted that 70 percent of adult smokers start before the age of 18, Walter Zelman, a professor of public policy at California State University, Los Angeles, said the most effective means to reduce public health costs from smoking was prevention.

"I know some may dislike the notion of using government to actively intervene in these kinds of things, but I think it's becoming increasingly aware in the public health and public policy community that these kinds of interventions are necessary," Zelman said.

The council voted unanimously to direct staff to come back with a tobacco licensing ordinance, but not before both Rosenthal and Councilmember Jefferson Wagner talked about their personal associations

with the issue of underage smoking. Rosenthal admitted she had been a teen smoker, while fellow Councilmember Pamela Conley Ulich teased Wagner, who was cast for years in television commercials as "The Marlboro Man."

Wagner noted, however, that he never actually smoked. "The advertising implement, which was myself, would hold the [cigarette] in my fingers, and then the smoke [was] applied afterwards," he said.

City receives \$300,000 PCH safety grant

Mayor Pro Tem Laura Rosenthal announced at Monday's meeting the city had been given a \$300,000 grant from Caltrans to devise a safety plan for Pacific Coast Highway.

"I want to thank public works ... they really did a great job with that grant application," Rosenthal said. "We're very excited to be able to accept that plan and move forward with the PCH safety plan."

The issue of highway safety was heightened after 13-year-old Emily Shane was killed last year when she was struck by a car driven by Winnetka resident Sina Khankhanian while she was walking along the highway.

Shortly after Shane's death, a local citizens safety group, A Safer PCH, was formed to address safety on the highway, and has been lobbying officials to come up with a plan to ameliorate accidents and deaths on PCH.

Khankhanian, 28, has been charged with second-degree murder and is scheduled to appear in court Aug. 18 where it is expected the judge will set a trial date.

City to add WiFi at Bluffs Park

The City Council Monday night voted unanimously to add wireless Internet at Bluffs Park.

The council allotted up to \$8,500 to install the service. Councilmember Pamela Conley Ulich originally opposed the measure, saying, "It would be nice to have technology-free zones" in natural areas such as the park. However, she changed her mind when Ryan Embree, a member of the city's Telecommunications Commission, noted that Bluffs Park is the designated evacuation center for disasters. Embree said it would be beneficial to have Internet service if people are forced to evacuate after a wildfire.

Council supports withdrawing U.S. troops in Middle East

The council narrowly approved a proposal by Councilmember Ulich to add the City of Malibu's support to a resolution by the United States Conference of Mayors advocating the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan and Iraq. Nearly 150 mayors at the conference recently supported the resolution, which calls for a "strategic" drawdown of U.S. troops in the region.

Derogatory remarks made about the troops by one speaker Monday night on the item drew an animated response from Mayor John Sibert.

"Those are important people who are watching out for us," Sibert said. "And I don't want to have that be lost."

Sibert, who served in the U.S. Marine Corps, said the people he served with were good people who he remained friends with today. He credited his time in the Marines with giving him the drive to succeed.